

The changing role of the central planning offices Latin America : a comparative historical analysis perspective (1950-2013)

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Abstract

The Changing Role of the Central Planning Offices in Latin America: A Comparative Historical Analysis Perspective (1950-2013)

Over the past sixty years, the central planning agencies in Latin America have undergone multiple transformations in their structural design. These agencies came to life during the late 1950s in response to a development strategy that required the state to provide long-run direction to development by means of economic planning. Three decades later, the same agencies were reshaped, reconfigured or redeployed to serve the purposes of an entirely different development strategy. The planning body in these countries started to perform functions suitable of a free-market development model, shifting away from their prior focus on an inward development strategy. Subsequently, Latin American countries started to experience a rebirth of the state's economic presence around 2000, including a new reshaping of the economic planning agencies. In between these three distinct strategies for economic and social development, the planning agencies were continuously assigned and redirected toward a wide range of functions as seen necessary. What explains the fact that the same agency, created with the function of planning economic development, has served across time and governments with sometimes sharp ideological, economical, and political differences? What characteristics does this agency entail and which is its appeal allowing it to persist for such a long period of time?

The underlying research in this dissertation seeks to answer these questions by describing and analyzing the major institutional variables that have influenced the changing role of Latin American central planning agencies during the last sixty years.

The choice of the planning body, as the subject of study, is grounded on the fact that these agencies have had a unique position within the public sector in Latin America, becoming a real institution. Together with the central banks and ministries of finance, these three organizations have stood out as efficiency pockets vis a vis public administration. However while the first two, regardless of the economic model in place, are necessary to administer monetary and fiscal policies for macroeconomic stability, the planning body could easily become dispensable especially in light of the obvious reduction of state intervention.

Theoretical work on organizational institutionalism like the structural-instrumental, cultural-institutional, task-specific and institutional environment perspectives, are powerful for explaining changes during specific historical moments in the Latin American planning organizations. However, the

empirical data suggests that it is important to complement such analysis with conceptual tools that capture the logic of endogenous and gradual organizational transformation. Therefore, these perspectives are complemented with Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) conceptual tools that capture the logic of endogenous and gradual change.

Case studies are crucial for the present study. These take the form of a detailed narrative account that purports to throw light on how an organizational transformation came about. In this context, this research relies on techniques that fall under the label of process tracing in order to use evidence, from within and between case studies, which allows assessing the hypothesized causal mechanisms that explain change in the Latin American central planning. For each of the theoretical approaches mentioned, the research deduces the implicit causal mechanism linking theoretical explanatory variable and organizational transformation. The empirical evidence used to assess whether the observable implications were present and operated as expected is based on in-depth field research in Argentina, Ecuador, Chile and Colombia

The core research's finding highlights that the presidential system of government that has characterized Argentina, Ecuador, Chile and Colombia, and the structural arrangement of central planning agencies, together allowed for what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) identify as a "conversion" mode of institutional change. Despite external shocks and pressures having been powerful stimuli for changes in the organizational arrangements of the planning body in these countries, organizational transformations have consistently been the result of sixty years of Presidents' redeployment of the goals, functions and purposes of the planning body.